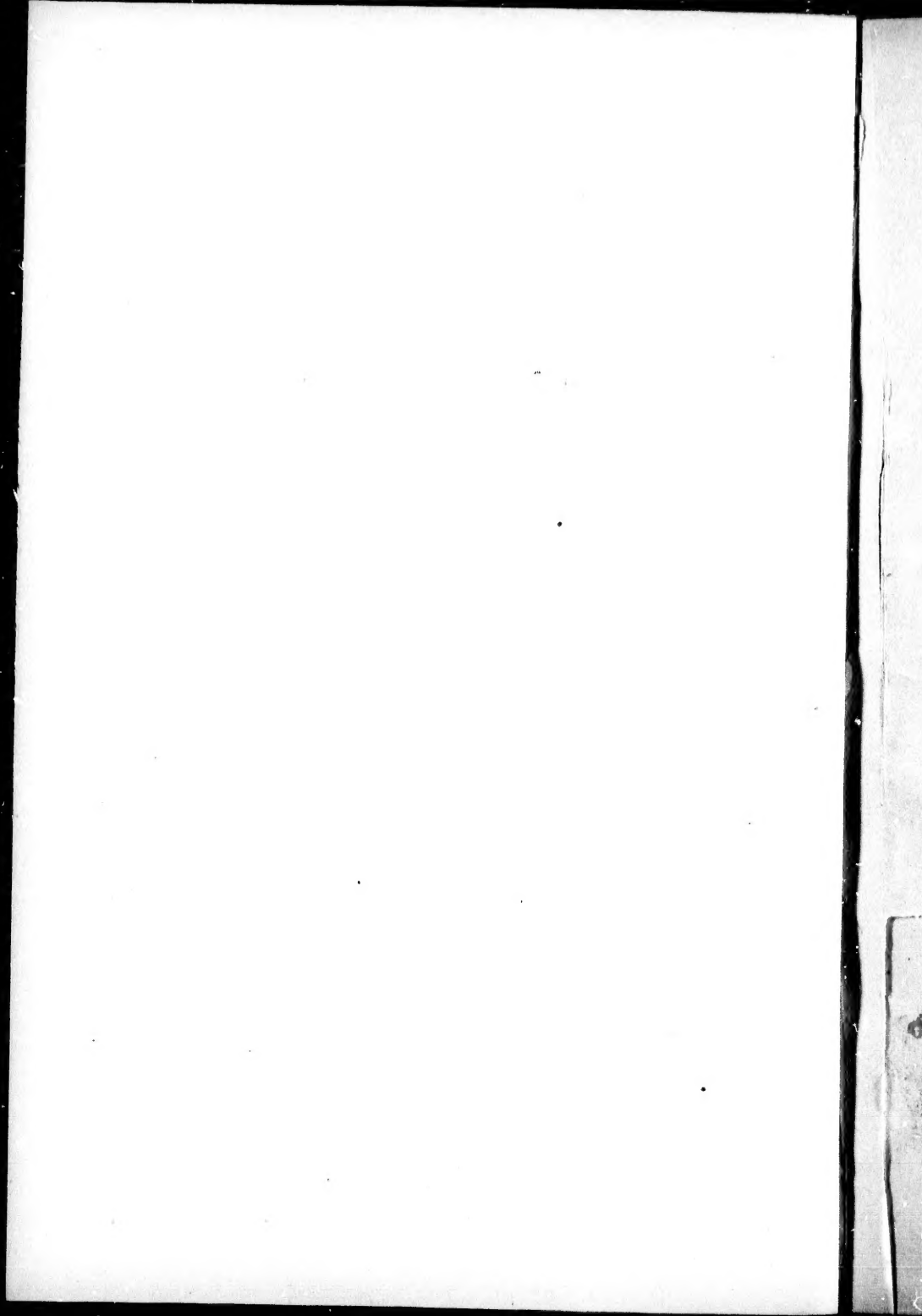




Rev J W Dobson

SERMONS

UPON

THE SECOND ADVENT OF OUR LORD.

PREACHED

At Trinity Church, St. John,

IN DECEMBER, 1864.

BY THE REV. I. W. D. GRAY, D. D.,

HONORARY CANON OF THE CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST'S CHURCH, AND
RECTOR OF THE PARISH OF ST. JOHN, N. B.

repeated sermon Feb 9 1868
aged 70 years
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ST. JOHN, N. B.

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1865.

SERMONS

In committing these Sermons to the Press, the Author of them desires to say, that they were not written with any view to their being published. He is quite sensible of their defects; but cheerfully complies with the request of his Parishioners, and shall be truly glad, if in the hands of the Spirit, they should be made instrumental in strengthening the faith or animating the hopes of those, amongst whom it has long been his privilege to minister in holy things. His earnest desire and prayer for them is that they may live "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of Christ," and be found waiting for and ready to welcome Him, when the time of His glorious Advent arrives.

Grace Halifax
on Tomb

Rev J. W. D. Gray V D
Rector of St John NB
Born 23 July 1797 Died 1st January 1868
In 71 years

He is not dead whose glorious mind
Lifts ours on high
To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die

Sermons

UPON

THE SECOND ADVENT OF OUR LORD.

"Where is the promise of His coming?"—II. Peter, iii. 4.

THE true posture of the militant Church is a waiting one. It has always before it an object of expectation. That object, under the Jewish economy, was Messiah's advent in the flesh. He was to come indeed as the King of Zion and Lord of His Temple, yet as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, divested of form and comeliness, afflicted of God and despised by Man. Under the Christian dispensation the eyes of the waiting Church are still directed to the same object, but under widely different circumstances. It is not now the infant of Bethlehem, but the mighty and triumphant God, not the feeble scion of the house of David, but the Lord of Glory, not bending under the Cross, but seated upon a throne, not followed by a few timid disciples, but surrounded by myriads of heavenly spirits, all radiant with the beauty of holiness, ready and able to execute their Lord's commands.

To this object believers, under the Gospel, are taught to look forward with intense desire, as the blessed hope of the Church, as a matter of great rejoicing and inevitable certainty, but still with much obscurity, as to the precise time of its occurrence. They may investigate prophecies

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and scrutinize their circle of dates, and endeavor to find the centre where their radii meet; but all in vain; "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but the Father only."

The reason why these things are thus placed before us in Scripture is obvious. This expecting state is favorable to preparation: and the obscurity which rests upon the question of time, shews the necessity for being always prepared: it says to all the expectants of that glorious event, "Be ye also ready, for at such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

The Scriptures, however, by no means authorize us to suppose, that all who hear the Gospel and have the opportunity of knowing these things, will be influenced by such an expectation. On the contrary they plainly tell us that there will be *many* even in the latter days, when these events are hastening on to their consummation, who will set at naught the warnings they offer, some *practically* denying them by their unholy lives, "having the form of godliness, and denying the power thereof," others rejecting them, not merely in practice, but in theory too, openly scoffing at the thought of a final retribution, and demanding, in reference to the Judge of quick and dead, "where is the promise of his coming"?

Believing it to be well for the Christian to be prepared for this state of things, especially in times like the present when so much infidelity prevails, I purpose to take this demand of the unbeliever, as the subject of our reflections to-day, weighing first the QUESTION, and then the CHRISTIAN'S ANSWER to it; and for a week or two to come, to follow out the important revelations of this instructive chapter in regard to the *second Advent*, and the *immediate consequences of it*, both to man, and to the world which he at present inhabits.

May the Spirit of God be our guide and teacher while we are employed in these meditations !

I. The question is, "where is the promise of His coming?"

And to estimate the bearing of this question upon the Christian's faith, it may be well to note, in the first place, *who are the persons that ask it?*

The doubts which some entertain in regard to revealed religion arise from *intellectual* causes. The *apparent* conflict between science and the Bible, or the *seeming* discrepancies between *different parts of the Bible itself*, or the various and widely opposed *interpretations* of it by its professed friends, may suggest such doubts without any fault on the part of the receiver. But when such misgivings present themselves to an ingenuous mind, they are not eagerly grasped at, or used for any bad purpose. They are not boasted of as the discoveries of an independent mind, or employed for the purpose of undermining the faith of others. They are a grief to the person who feels them. They lead him to humble inquiry, to fervent prayer, to patient waiting upon God, and are sure in God's good time to be removed.*

A man of refined taste and education, who had been thrown into the society of infidels in his early days, once stated his doubts to me. He said he sincerely wished that he could believe the Bible for he felt that infidelity could never make him happy. There was a void in his soul that it could not fill. After conversing with him much on the subject of his doubts, I recommended him to *try prayer*, and to *persist* in it even in the midst of doubts. At the end of six months, he frankly confessed that his doubts were rapidly leaving him, that he could now read his Bible with comfort and was comparatively happy. I know

* Isai. 40. 31.

not whether he is now living or not, but I do know that, before he left the community where I then resided, he was a constant and apparently sincere and fervent communicant in my Church.

There are *others*, whose doubts are the result of moral rather than intellectual causes; and yet it may be they are not themselves *immoral* persons, or even conscious of the real source from whence those doubts arise. Their scepticism, in some instances, springs from the disgust they feel at seeing the inconsistencies of religious persons, and from attaching too much importance to their mistakes and infirmities, thus failing to discriminate between the essential verities of religion, and the mere circumstantialia that attend it in persons of weak intellects, though it may be of sincere hearts. These doubters are, in many instances, more to blame than the persons from whom they derive their pleas for doubting. They are responsible for not analysing their own feelings, and tracing out the true cause of their unbelief. If they examined their hearts faithfully they would see that pride or vanity, or the mere gratification of taste was the true cause from whence their doubts sprung, in other words, that they were mere prejudices, fostered by their own internal emotions, and as such rendering them criminal before God.

But the persons who put the question in the text belong to neither of the classes I have now named. The context shows that they are men of a very different stamp. Their unbelief arises, not from the difficulty of reconciling Scripture with science, or with itself, nor from the inconsistencies they observe in those who profess to be religious, but simply from the love of sin, and the wish to pursue it undisturbed by the rebukes of conscience, or the terrible forebodings of a future judgment.

St. Peter gives us in the context, a full length portrait of

these persons. He describes them as "scoffers," men who, like Voltaire, treat the whole subject of religion with profane contempt and ridicule, and whose manner of life is worthy of their creed, being stained with the grossest impurities. He styles them "spots and blemishes," meaning that they were a disgrace and scandal to the Christian name. He represents them as "sporting themselves with their own deceivings" while they mingled with the faithful in their holy feasts;" as having "eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin" as "beguiling unstable souls," alluring into the paths of death those who had previously "escaped from the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

It may seem strange to us that such men could introduce themselves into Christian society at all, that they should be permitted for a moment to retain the name of Christians and still more so, that they should be suffered to mingle with Christians in their holy rites. But we see enough, at the present day, to convince us that men of licentious habits still cling to the *forms* of Christianity, and that Teachers of the grossest heresies, adhere to *offices* from which emoluments are derived.

Such are the men who put the question in the text. Let us now inquire *what they mean by it?* It is quite possible for such a question to be put by the true Christian to indicate his ardent desire for his Saviour's advent. Thus the martyrs of old were represented as crying from beneath the Altar, "how long, O Lord, holy and true dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood, on them that dwell on the earth?" But when the scoffer asks, "where is the promise of His coming," he has a very different meaning. His object is to deny that Christ will ever come for the purpose declared in Scripture, viz, to judge the World,

* See chapter 2.

and this, with the further object of undermining the faith of others, and releasing them from those fears of a future judgment, which exercise a restraint upon their conduct.

But why undermine the faith of others? Why not allow them to cherish their expectation, even if it be delusive, of happiness beyond the tomb? Because my Brethren, wicked men do not wish to stand alone: they like to have companions in their guilt, inasmuch as it tends to allay their own fears. They wish that the holy Jesus may never come to judge the World, and labor to strengthen their own convictions that he never will, by subverting the faith of others and drawing them into their own wretched delusions. There is a lurking apprehension in the mind of the Infidel, that the testimony of the Bible, as to the return of Christ, may after all prove true, an apprehension which the presence of a firm and consistent believer tends to deepen. On the other hand, the vacillations and apostacies, of unstable souls tend to encourage him. Hence his efforts to multiply these apostacies: hence his scoffs at the earnest Christian's belief, and his arguments, such as they are, to subvert it.

Some grounds however, apparent or real, unbelievers must have, for asserting that Christ will not return to judge the World; let us now therefore inquire *why they profess to think so.*"

The reason is plainly stated in the following terms, "For since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation."*

By "the Fathers" are meant, the persons to whom the prophets delivered their predictions of the mighty changes for which Christians look at the second Advent: by the "all things," the objects and operations of nature in the visible Universe around us; and the thing asserted is, that

* Chap. 2, v. 4.

these continue the same, as when the Fathers died, and as they had continued, up to their time, from the very beginning. In other words, the proposition is, that the order of things established at the Creation, as it never has been, so it never will be disturbed. The heavenly bodies revolve in their wonted orbits: the seasons come round in their regular course: day and night succeed each other in their accustomed rotation. All this has been the case for thousands of years. It depends upon the laws of nature, which never vary; and which cannot vary; for permanence is the very law which is inherent in the constitution of the Universe.

Such in substance is the argument which St. Peter puts into the mouth of the Infidel. If his words are prophetic of the Infidel notions of these latter days, we must grant that they express them to the life. If they also indicate the sentiments of Infidels in his days, then Infidels in every age think alike, and speak alike, and are to be met by the Christian with the same arguments, which the pen of inspiration has suggested, in the chapter before us.

II. The Christian's answer to the demand in the text, is three fold, shewing, first, that *that the Infidel's assumption is not true*: secondly, that, *if true, it would not warrant the inference he draws from it*: and lastly, that for the apparent delay in executing the Divine decree, *there is an ample reason to be found in the benevolent designs of the Deity*. Let us dwell, for a few moments, on these several points.

First, the Infidel assumption *is not true*. The present order of things has *not* been permanent since the Creation. It was interrupted at the Deluge. The Apostle's allusion to this is remarkable. "For this, he says, they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, whereby the world that then was, being overflow-

ed with water perished."* The wording of this passage is peculiar, and in some respects obscure ; but the meaning seems to be, that as at the time of Creation, the earth, by Divine command, emerged from the waters that encompassed it, so, at the time of the deluge, it was, by the same command, submerged again in those waters, and, as far as man was conversant with it, *perished*, i. e. was reduced to utter desolation.

I say, as far as man was conversant with it, because, to sustain the Apostle's argument, it is of little consequence which of the current theories in regard to the diluvian destruction we adopt, whether we think that the earth, returning to its primeval state, was *totally* submerged, or whether we regard the universality of which the Scripture speaks, as meaning *the whole Earth with its overarching heavens with which man was then conversant*, and which might have been limited to the central regions of Asia ; it is immaterial, I say which of these views we embrace, as far as the Apostle's argument is concerned ; for, in either case, it is obvious, that the order and operations of this material Creation have been so interrupted, as to involve, in one promiscuous ruin, man with his habitations and works, together also with the animal and vegetable kingdoms, as far as he had any acquaintance with them.

In vain then, does the eye of the sceptic range through the diversified fields of nature, marking the beautiful order in which their various operations are conducted. In vain does he lift his eyes to the blue expanse above him, and looking upon the sun in his brightness, and the moon in her silent grandeur, and musing upon the regularity and perfect system with which they perform their apparent circuits, infer that they are always to cast their reviving beams upon the habitations of man, that "the thing which

*Vs. 5 & 6.

has been is the thing which will be" through eternally revolving ages: in vain does he speculate upon the permanency of nature's laws; they are permanent, my Brethren! just so long as but not one moment longer than the All-Mighty Legislator, who stamped them at first upon the works of His hands, is pleased that they *shall* be permanent. And, in ascertaining how long that will be, His word is a better guide for us, than all the speculative systems which man's wisdom can devise. Let God be true, though it lead to the inference, that "every man's a liar."

Even if it were true, which it certainly is not, that nature's operations had proceeded in calm and uniform order, from the Creation to the present hour; if no deluge had descended from the clouds, no subsidence of Continents taken place to admit the waves of the deep, and no Ark had ever floated over the expanse of invading waters, what then, my Brethren? Would the little span that had intervened between man's introduction to this terrestrial scene and the present age, warrant the conclusion that the world is to last for ever, in its present form, or that man is to be the perpetual occupant of it? Assuredly not. The induction is not sufficient to sustain the inference that is built upon it; and to remind us of this, the Apostle says at the eight verse of this Chapter—"but beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." St. Peter does not mean by this, as some have unwarrantably taught, that when we meet the term day in the prophetic Scriptures, we are to understand it to mean a thousand years. The Apostle had no such irrelevant thought before his mind. What he designed to teach was, that, "no finite duration bears any proportion to the Eternity of God," that we are not to measure His views by our conceptions of what is long or short, that we are

not to conclude, because a promise he has given remains unfulfilled for a thousand or a hundred thousand years, that therefore it will never be accomplished. We should rather contemplate, with profound awe, the Majesty of that Being who sees from Everlasting to Everlasting, to whose infinite mind, the past the present and the future are expanded in all their minute details, and shrink back at the thought of measuring His Eternal Counsels, by what we behold within the diminutive cycles of time. If in estimating the proceedings of the Divine Being, we could burst from the chains that bind us to Earth, if for a little season, we could soar above this narrow spot on which we dwell, and survey the operations of Providence from those glorious heights where the Infinite One presides, our views of time and space would alter: we should see the folly of measuring the counsels of heaven, by the rules of earthly calculations, or limiting the dealings of the Sovereign of the Universe by man's fraction of scientific attainment.

Judging by a correct standard, the time of waiting for our Lord's return, is a diminutive period; and for this delay, insignificant as it is, there is a *reason* that ought to command our admiration and gratitude. That reason is to be found in the boundless compassion of God, which leads Him to afford to all, even the present despisers of mercy a reasonable time for repentance. "God is not slack, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If at the present moment, even while we are assembled in this Church, our Lord should suddenly appear in these lower heavens, and summon the nations of the earth before Him, to be judged according to their deeds, how many thousands would be cut off in their sins, who might hereafter turn to God and be

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saved! How many perhaps amongst ourselves, who are now trifling with the proffers of His love, but who may hereafter have conviction brought home to their souls, and be drawn to Christ for salvation, would in that case be found unprepared to meet their God! But will not this, you may be disposed to ask, be the case at any time upon our Lord's arrival, happen when it may? Perhaps not my Brethren, at all events, not in an equal degree. As the Gospel spreads among the nations, the collective body of mankind have the means of accepting or refusing its gracious offers more extensively placed within their reach. The rejection of these, on the part of the wicked fills up the measure of their *guilt*. There is also a progress for good or evil, in the *moral* condition of the world. As individuals ripen for glory or degradation, becoming daily more fitted for the respective regions, whether of bliss or misery, which they are to occupy in a future world, so it is with nations during their national history, and with the entire population of the earth during the earth's continuance. As time rolls on, the two classes of men which compose the world's population become more distinct, believers more decidedly pious, unbelievers more intensely wicked;" and of this perhaps we have an intimation in the appalling description which St. Paul gives of the perilous times that are to come "in the last days,"* a description, it may be, that will have its most ample fulfillment at the closing period of the present dispensation. There is now therefore a reason for our Lord's delay which will not always exist; for this progress in good or evil will one day reach its *culminating* point; so that at last, when the sickle of the reaping angels is applied, "the harvest of the earth will be *ripe*."

* II. Tim. 3. 1-5.

May God in His abundant mercy grant, that those amongst us, who are still unconverted, still living without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world, may take advantage of that precious season while His long suffering lasts, to "repent and be converted that their sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;" and may those amongst us who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and pledged their souls to Him, see the futility of the Infidel's scoff, and be prepared to give to him, and to every man that asks it, "a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."—AMEN!

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"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." II. Pet. iii. 10.

In the earlier verses of this Chapter, we are taught that Infidelity of the worst kind is to be expected "in the last days." To this prediction your attention was called on Sunday last. You then saw the bearing of that Infidelity upon the Christian's blessed hope, the hope which centres in the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. You saw the reason why the unbeliever wishes to hide that prospect from his mind, and the folly of his appeal to the permanency of Nature's Laws to aid him in his attempt. You saw, my Brethren! and felt, I trust, that the centuries which have intervened, or which may yet intervene, between the giving and the accomplishment of the Divine promise, were not to be accounted a long period, that let them be multiplied as they may, they are after all, but a diminutive span, in comparison of those rolling ages which stretch into a past and future eternity, and which expand before the Infinite mind of Him, from whom that promise emanated. You were reminded also, and this is by no means the least weighty consideration that ought to sustain the believer in patiently waiting for his Lord's return, that there is a reason, an ample reason, growing out of the benevolent designs of a merciful God, which sufficiently accounts for every moment's delay in regard to this great event. Thus fortified against the baneful influence of the unbelievers suggestions, which often harass, even where they do not convince, let us turn

our thoughts this morning, to some of the further disclosures of this Chapter upon the subject of the second Advent—viz. the *certainly* the *manner* and the *consequences* of it.

I. The Era of this great event, St. Peter styles in the text, “the day of the Lord,” meaning by these terms, “the day of His coming.” At the seventh verse he styles it “the day of Judgment,” indicating as I conceive, that the second Advent, and the Judgment of the World, are events that stand in close proximity.

Not that we are to understand the term “day” which is here employed, as limited to what we mean by the solar day, or the period of twenty-four hours. In our popular use of the term, we do not necessarily so limit it. We sometimes mean by it, the duration of a man’s life, sometimes the age in which he lived, and sometimes we speak of the *gospel day*, meaning by it, the undefined period of the gospel dispensation. Precisely in the same latitude, is this term used in Scripture: it means there a duration having limits, but those limits various, and not to be ascertained by the mere force of the term itself. In some instances it indicates the solar day in others a year, and in the first Chapter of Genesis, those extended periods, marked indeed by well defined limits, but yet, as it regards the duration of the periods themselves, unknown to any but the Infinite God who determined them. We have nothing, therefore, to guide us as to the extent of this day of the Lord: all we know is, that the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of Heaven, prepared, as the Judge of Quick and Dead, to summon the nations of the World before Him, will initiate the morning of that day, and that its duration will be sufficiently long to accomplish the mighty objects for which He returns to it.

But will that day in very deed arrive? Are we sure that it will come? The Apostle affirms it in the text, but

his attestation is only one out of many concurrent testimonies. Let us recall to our minds a few of them.

There is first the silent testimony of that inward monitor which we term *conscience*, awakening mysteriously in the recesses of the soul, the deep conviction, that we have a future account to render.

Then there is the testimony of *reason*, leading the thoughtful mind to infer it, from the imperfect adjustment of human rights in the present world. Solomon's words are striking. "I saw under the Sun the place of Judgment that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there." And what then? Why the very inference I have named—"I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked."*

Then there is the plain and positive assurance of *God's inspired witnesses*, reiterated under each successive dispensation. Hear it from the Prophet of Antediluvian times: "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all."† Hear it from the wisest of men under the legal economy: "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."‡ Hear it, lastly, from the lips of the blessed Jesus himself: "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."§ There is nothing obscure, nothing figurative, nothing mystical in this language. The testimony is plain, literal, unequivocal, and it extends over more than 3000 years.

And then, my Brethren! there is the *foreshadowing* of a future judgment, in those striking *interpositions* of *Provi-*

* Eccles. 3—vs. 16—17. † Jude 14. ‡ Eccles. xii. 14. § Matt. 25, vs. 31-33.

dence which we sometimes witness, where the criminal is drawn forth from what had seemed impenetrable shades, and convicted, by the very means he has employed to conceal his guilt. Mark this, in a recent example.

Tempted, like Achan, by the glittering gold, a young man perpetrates murder in a railway carriage. No human eye is witness to it. The darkness of night envelops him. He leaves the carriage unsuspected, mingles with the crowds of the great metropolis of England, soon sails for a distant land, reaches it in safety, and is just about to mingle with its busy population. Who can interrupt his prospects? Who can cast a suspicion upon him? The blood of his victim indeed cries for vengeance, but that cry is too distant to be heard: the broad Atlantic rolls between to intercept it, and even if it could reach beyond its waves, it could not name the murderer. Yes, but it *need not* name him: his name is already told: the lining of a hat left in the blood stained carriage has told it: a little paper box, given as a play thing to a child has told it: and already the minister of Justice stands beside him: then the carefully secreted watch confirms the previous testimony: no doubt remains as to the perpetrator: he is arrested, re-conducted over the ocean he has so lately crossed, tried, convicted, executed, after confessing his guilt, and all, in little more than four brief months from the dark hour in which he committed the foul deed.* Is there no evidence here of an over-ruling Providence? no sign of retributive justice? no foreshadowing of a future judgment? no unfolding of those principles of the Divine government which authorize us to infer what *will* be, from what *has already* been?

The sudden and unexpected manner in which these interpositions sometimes burst upon the criminal who imagines that he is exempt from danger, is a material cir-

* See account of Müller's trial in London Times.

cumstance that will find its counterpart at the second Advent of our Lord. To impress this upon us is the object of the comparison which we find in the text, as well as in other passages of Scripture, between the coming of Christ, and the coming of a thief at night.

An extraordinary inference has been drawn from this comparison by persons whose imaginations outweigh their judgments, that prior to the coming of Christ on that august occasion, the bodies of the saints will be secretly removed from their resting-places in the tomb, and translated to the presence of their Lord. This extravagant deduction from the comparison between the coming of our Lord and the coming of the thief at night has arisen from overlooking the fact, that the design of the comparison is not to illustrate the *object*, but the *manner* of his coming, and, in regard to this, simply, that it will be *sudden and unexpected*. It was never meant to indicate that our Lord's Advent, at that time would be either secret in itself, or for secret purposes. On the contrary, the whole Universe will witness both His coming and His acts. As the lightning cometh out of the East, and shineth even unto the West, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." And when the opening tombs release their awakened tenants, whether those who rise to descend again into deeper gloom, or those who rise to shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever, the Archangel's trumpet will announce the fact, in the recesses, however remote, of Heaven, Earth and Hell; and yet, it will be true, in accordance with the revelation in our text, that the Advent of Christ will be a sudden and unexpected event, by a portion, at least, of the then living occupants of the world.

Vast changes I doubt not, will take place in the relative positions of the Church and the world before this event occurs. The Gospel message will have sounded in the

ears, and no doubt will have reached the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands now sitting in Pagan darkness and the deep shades of moral death. It may be that not one member of the human family at that time, will be ignorant of the name and gracious invitations of Christ. But there may be myriads who will have rejected them, through unbelief and hardness of heart, and who will be saying, as Infidels have ever said in profane derision, "where is the promise of His coming?"

What a dreadful shock must such men realize then! What an icy coldness must seize upon the springs of life when doubt gives way to conviction, when delusion flees before the actual vision of the Christ of God, when the scoff cannot banish, and the laugh cannot drown, and companions cannot hide the solemn truth, that all must stand before the Judgment Seat! Our imaginations may give us some faint conceptions of the thrill of horror which rushed through the soul of a solitary criminal, when he saw before him, on the deck, the officer of Justice; but who can measure, in his thoughts, the terrible consternation, heightened by the sympathy of millions, which will seize the unconverted, when they look upon the radiant countenance of the Lord of Glory? Whose lips could then sing, in unfaltering tones?

"Great God, what do I see and hear!

"The end of things created:

"The Judge of all men doth appear,

"On clouds of Glory seated:

"The trumpet sounds the graves restore

"The dead which they contained before."

II. Yes, the graves will restore their dead. What a preliminary, my Brethren! to the solemn events that are to follow! That restoration I presume, will include the bodies of the just as well as the unjust, for I see no inti-

mation here or elsewhere, of any protracted interval between the rising of these two classes, unless we are to find it in one highly figurative passage in Revelations, which has, I think, a totally different meaning, and which would have to form an exception to the general mode of interpretation which that Prophecy demands, in order to warrant this view of it.*

And when this stupendous event has occurred, when the Tombs of successive ages, and the areas, of Battle fields, and the recesses of the mighty deep, have yielded up their tenants, and their kindred spirits have come from the invisible world to occupy them again, then shall all stand, not on the surface of the earth, that would be too contracted a sphere, but in the regions of the clouds above us, where all, Angelic as well as human, who encircle the throne of our Incarnate God, will find a place prepared for them. And that, my Brethren! will be your *leave-taking* of the present world 'as you now behold it, though not your immediate introduction to that different scene, which you are to occupy, when the cycles of time have completed their revolutions.

For *then* comes the awful crisis which is properly termed "the day of Judgment" because it will witness that final adjudication as to the state and destinies of men, of which all temporal and intermediate Judgments are but the feeble adumbrations. Then each one of us must give an account of himself or herself to God, a separate account, a full account, embracing every transaction, every word and every thought that has been connected with our personal history, and each of these, with a precision that cannot mistake, and an impartiality which cannot be impeached, will have

*The Author is quite aware of the number of pious and learned writers who have advocated the Millenarian view of this text and has carefully noted what that very able Expositor, Mr. Elliott, has said in his "Horn Apocalypticæ;" but, after doing so, is still inclined to regard the view taken by the late Mr. Simeon, as more in accordance with the analogy of Faith.

to pass under the scrutiny of the Omniscient God. All these elements of personal character will then be analysed before the myriads that are assembled there, analysed, not to inform the Deity as to what we have done or said or thought, but to display to the whole intelligent creation His Justice in condemning the wicked, and His Grace in pardoning the believer.

In reference to the *former* of these classes, this crisis is styled in the context, the "*day of perdition of ungodly men.*" The word "*ungodly*" comprehends all who have not the love of God in their hearts, and whose lives are not conformed to the demands of Christ's holy Gospel. Of all such, though doubtless among them, there will be various shades of guilt, and, as the result of these varieties, a penalty adapted to the state of each, yet, of all such, there is one emphatic term that describes their final destiny, and that term is "*perdition,*" a word which conveys an intimation the more app'ling, because it does not mean annihilation, or a state of unconsciousness, but that sad condition to which the Scripture affixes the name of the "*second death,*" and, to represent the misery and perpetuity of which, it employs the most terrific images which language can supply. I know, my Brethren, that people do not like to hear much upon this subject now. The doctrine of eternal punishment is not a popular one. The sickly sentimentalism of the age shrinks back from it. Infidels revile it; divines too frequently soften it, and high tribunals treat it as an open question. But God's word, whether declared by Prophets, Apostles, or the Holy Jesus himself, describes the penalty of those who fall short of the Kingdom of Christ, as an *eternal* one, as a living death, which admits of no reversal, beyond the probationary term of the present life.

It is here, my Brethren, in this preparatory school,

where remedial measures can be employed, where the offers of mercy are sounding in our ears, and the provisions of mercy are awaiting our acceptance, that the possibility of escaping the wrath to come, is afforded to the sinner. In the world that sin marred, must the pardon of sin be gained, if it be ever gained at all. But how will it be gained there, when the world itself has reached the termination of its career, being blotted from existence altogether, or so changed in its condition and use, as to be no longer the abode of an Apostate and fallen race?

This mighty revolution in the physical condition of our world is the point that now claims attention. Let us ponder it for a moment. The pen of inspiration says that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise" that "being on fire, they shall be dissolved," that "the elements shall melt with fervent heat," that "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

In touching upon a subject so utterly beyond the reach of our experience or powers of computation, it behoves us to take heed not to go beyond what is written. It is unwise, I conceive to attempt to fill up the blanks which scripture has left unfilled, or to define what revelation has left undefined; but there are some things in this description which are plain, level to our comprehension, which are intended to be understood and to leave their impression upon us.

It seems obvious, in the first place that the language employed here, is to be received in a literal, and not in a figurative sense. The Apostle is not using the terms Earth, Heaven, elements, as symbols of spiritual things. By the Earth, he means the Globe we tread upon: by the heavens, the aerial regions that immediately surround us; and by the elements, just what we mean, and what the

ancients meant by that term ; air, water, earth, the component parts of this material fabrick. That this literal acceptance is the true one here, the whole design and scope of the passage, together with the allusion to the deluge, as an illustration, places, I think, beyond a doubt.

Another point that may be viewed as certain, is the fact, that " fire " is to be the instrument employed to accomplish the destruction which is here predicted, whatever the nature or extent of that destruction may be. And, independently of revelation's testimony upon this point, which is as plain as language can make it, there is nothing in itself more probable than the suggestion. When we reflect that fire was a constituent part in the original composition of our World, that the World itself was once in a melted condition under its influence, that it probably still rages with intense heat at the Earth's centre, and that it would only require the increase of one of the component parts of our atmosphere, or the diminution of another, to cause these aerial heavens to burst into flames around us, we see that what revelation disclosed upon this point at a remote period, is in perfect harmony with the discoveries of science in after times.

We reach however a more difficult question, when we come to inquire into the *extent* of that destruction, which is here predicted. The language employed is strong. Of the heavens, it is said, " they shall be dissolved and pass away," of the " elements," that " they shall melt with fervent heat," of " the Earth and its works," that they " shall be burned up." The *melting*, the *dissolving*, the *burning*, the *passing-away*, are all plainly asserted. But what does this mean ? Annihilation of the materials of our World ? Not necessarily. The blotting it out from its place in the planetary system ? It may be so, or it may not. The reduction of its surface to a state of utter desolation, so that

the vestiges of man's inhabitation of it, shall be forever obliterated? Yes, undoubtedly, at the lowest estimate, it must mean this. It must, as far as its adaptation to be the abode of man extends, imply a total destruction. *His* world, with which he has been conversant, with all its beauties and defects, with all its pleasures and its sorrows, with all the magnificence of nature, with all the achievements of art and science, must crumble under the power of the devouring flame, and pass into oblivion. It may then be the will of God to renovate it again for other purposes; or it may be His will to leave it for ever, a barren waste, without atmosphere, without vegetation, without inhabitant, a vacant, lonely, sin-smitten monument of the wrath of Heaven. But, whichever of these it may please the Sovereign of the Universe to choose, this Earth and these heavens, as we now behold them, will have passed away, not by a *gradual* process, as nature's changes are now conducted, but by a rapid and violent convulsion, the suspension, if so we are pleased to term it, of those wise but misconstrued laws, in which the Infidel finds the pledge, of a permanency never to end.

What a scene my Brethren, will that be to witness! Can the heart contemplate it, even at a distance, without feelings of the deepest awe? When a cyclone rolls over a single city, or a conflagration rages through a single village, what consternation spreads on every hand! What sadness, what amazement, what terror, as the power of the raging element increases, and the helplessness of man becomes more and more apparent, and the work of ruin spreads, without indicating the limits of its desolating commission! Yet, what are such events, but the drops of water to the Ocean, or the grain of sand to the whole world, in comparison of that tremendous sight, where every city, and every forest, and every wave of the vast

Ocean and of the still vaster fields of ether that encircle it, shall dissolve under the power of the devouring flame?

"Heaven and earth *shall* pass away, but my word," said the blessed Jesus, "shall not pass away," Do you credit this my Brethren? Do you expect to witness this terrific scene? Do you realize the fact, that when your bodies have slept for a season in the silent tomb, and your spirits have been conversant for a little while with that invisible world, the scenes of which, as far as we are concerned, are veiled in impenetrable mystery, your eyes will actually look upon a dissolving world, upon the complete dissolution of nature's frame work here, the utter destruction of terrestrial things, as far as they have been adjusted to your occupancy and comfort? Then why should you idolize that world? Why risk your happiness in Eternity, to amass its treasures? Why spend the little span of human probation, in rearing the memorials of ambitious folly, as if "your houses were to continue forever, and your dwelling-places to all generations"? O, is it not better to "seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness," to secure "an inheritance that is incorruptible," to embrace the free pardon and bow to the laws of Christ, that when the crumbling tenements of this world have passed away, you may have a mansion in His Father's house, as glorious as it is permanent, as full of rest and purity and joy, as your present abode is of unrest, disquietude, and sin?—AMEN.

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"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new Heavens, and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II. Pet. iii. 13.

In contemplating the events connected with the second Advent, we have reached the point at which the history of this world ends. If beyond the destruction which this chapter describes, and to which our attention has been already drawn, there remains for it any further uses in connection with the moral Government of God, or the destiny of His intelligent creatures, the Great Author of revelation has not seen fit to disclose it. As far as our knowledge extends it becomes as much a blank in the Creation, as the flowers and fruits of that terrestrial Paradise, in which our first parents spent the happy morning of their days. To the man whose all of hope centres in the present world, this thought must be a painful one indeed. What a gloomy prospect is it for him to think of the instantaneous destruction of all that is fair and lovely and attractive in earthly scenes! to see, by anticipation, the beauties of nature and the products of art and science, the wealth of the merchant, the books of the learned, the monuments of the ambitious, reduced, by one stroke of Divine vengeance, to the smouldering pile of ruins!

Yes, no doubt the thought of such a judgment, must be a sad one, to the man who lives at ease in his possessions, whose comforts all emanate from a worldly source, and whose affections all centre in the scenes with which he is conversant here. But is this the case with *all*? Is it so *now*? Will it be so *hereafter*? Look, my Brethren, at

that emphatic word, with which the text begins, for it marks a contrast here. "*Nevertheless*," says the Apostle, after describing the terrific scenes that will present themselves to the spectators of a dissolving world, "*nevertheless*," notwithstanding the mighty work of devastation, which sweeps away the resting place of the unbeliever, and scatters for ever his worldly prospects and visionary hopes, "*nevertheless*," *we*, who knew before-hand that this event was coming, *we* who believe in the Son of God, and to whom His Glorious Gospel has "*brought life and immortality to light*," "*we* look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Such is the bright prospect that expands before the mind of the true believer in the Son of God. The passing away of these heavens and this earth, however solemn such an event may seem to him, does not, as in the case of others, annihilate his hope; because, when he has done with these, he has more than an equivalent for them, in the happier regions to which he is hastening.

I. But whence this expectation, my Brethren? Who authorized the Christian to entertain it? The Apostle tells us that it rests upon a good foundation, the *promise* of God himself, "*we, according to His promise*, look for new heavens, and a new earth." Where then is that promise recorded? There are many promises emanating from the lips of our Lord and His Apostles, in reference to the resurrection and eternal life; but where do we find the express words of this promise, as St. Peter gives them to us in the text. In the Revelations of St. John no doubt we find them, but then that prophecy was not written when St. Peter penned this Epistle. Again we find them in the sixty-fifth chapter of the prophet Isaiah. There at the seventeenth verse, we read, "*For behold I create new Heavens and a new earth*," the identical words, you per-

ceive, which St. Peter uses; and I have no doubt, as a quotation from this very passage. It is true that the Prophet makes use of imagery in this chapter, which seems more applicable to the Church on earth than to the Church in glory, and particularly to the Jewish people after their restoration to Divine favor. But this does not prohibit the idea that some of its glowing promises are to have a higher fulfilment. It is obvious that several of its predictions look onward to the times of the Messiah, whose kingdom was to begin in this world, but to be consummated in heaven. Now, in describing the glories of that kingdom the prophets in general, and Isaiah more especially, appear to me to blend together without any laboured distinction, the terrene and the celestial images. They classify Messianic events, not so much according to their chronology as their character; so that in looking at a chapter which describes the blessings that are to be conferred upon God's church in after times, we discern a number of bright and beautiful images presented to our eyes without seeing the intervals of time between them, just as we look at the stars appearing in the firmamental heavens, as if they were all marshalled on the same plane, though in reality they are severed from each other by inconceivable distances. The Christian then need not hesitate to derive hopes of future glory from this promise because it is found in connexion with others which have a less exalted reference. Suffice it that the same Spirit which authorized the Prophet to utter that promise under the old economy, has taught an Apostle to interpret it under the new, and that his interpretation bids us look beyond this earthly scene for the fulfilment of it.

But what are the objects to which that promise points? Another "Heaven" and another "Earth" both of them "new," that is, different in many essential points, from

those he has been familiar with in this world. Wherein that difference, as far as it relates to physical distinctions, may consist, we cannot possibly define. The world he then inhabits, will no doubt be adapted, in all respects, to his altered condition, to a being possessed of a body as well as a soul, but that body a glorified one, refined, immortal, indestructible. The heavens and the earth of that world, will contain nothing that can in any way interfere with the happiness of the one, or the permanency of the other, but on the contrary, every thing that can minister to the supreme and eternal felicity of both.

We catch some glimpses of the excellence that pertains to those new heavens and that new earth, from the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelations, enough, not to satisfy our curiosity upon all points, but to elevate our conceptions of their superior glory, and perfect adaptation to the condition of man, in his renewed and glorified state. We learn for example, that in those empyreal *heavens*, neither sun nor moon will be present, and that simply because their light, beautiful as it is to us in this lower sphere, and essential to mark the alternations of day and night, will not be needed in a world where night never comes, and where a light more splendid, even the light of the Glory of the Father of Lights Himself, forever shines upon the mansions of the blessed. In regard to the new *earth* we are taught, that within its happy precincts, there will be no more "curse," and no more "sea;" in other words, there will be no vestige of that blighting sentence, under which the thorn and the thistle usurped the place of a more useful vegetation, giving rise to the incessant toil and labor of the human family. Nor will those wars and tumults and political convulsions, of which the sea, in prophetic language, is the expressive symbol, ever invade the territories of a world, whose occupants are united in the bonds of perfect and everlasting love.

But these blessings, which I have now enumerated are merely *negative* ones. The description, thus far, only tells us what will be *absent* from that scene. But the testimony of revelation does not rest here: it goes farther: it tells us, in certain particulars, what will be *present* there; and, in doing so, derives the imagery it employs, from the ancient record of the terrestrial Paradise. As, in Eden of old, there was a river that watered the garden, so, in Paradise regained, there will be "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," so that those who dwell there, will thirst no more. As, in the former, there was the tree of life, that would have conferred immortality on man, had he retained his innocence, so, in the latter, that tree will reappear, growing on either side of the river, that all may have access to it, bearing diversified fruits, that the taste for them may never be satiated, yielding them perpetually, that those who feed upon them may never hunger, and excluding, by the salutary virtues that pertain even to its leaves, the invasion of disease, or the possibility of death.

I do not doubt, my Brethren, that the language here employed, is to be understood, as other parts of this wonderful prophecy are, in a figurative sense; for what terms are there, derivable from earthly scenes, that could be strictly applicable to the inheritance of the saints in light? But, of this I am well assured, that whatever allowance is to be made for the use of figures and symbols, let them be as beautiful and expressive as they may, the reality will far exceed the picture they present to us: the antitype will transcend the type; the enjoyment will eclipse the anticipation; so that, like Sheba's Queen, when she beheld the glory of Solomon's palace and temple, we shall be compelled to say "the half was not told us." On the face of this Creation there is nothing more legibly written

than the term *progress*. Each successive revolution through which our world has passed, has been one of advancement. From the hour when the Spirit of God first brooded over the face of the primeval waters, imparting life to the lowest classes of animated beings, up to the time when man, the most perfect in the ascending scale, came forth in the image of his Creator, undeviating progress, step by step, and stage by stage, has been the order of the Divine procedure. What then must we expect to find in that new Creation which is held out to the righteous as their final reward which brings them into contact with the perfections of the Infinite God himself, and into the possession of blessings such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, even when aided by the light of the glorious Gospel day !

You will readily perceive from these remarks, my Brethern ! that I do not identify these descriptions of the new heavens and earth, with any occurrences that are to happen in what are termed *millennial* times ; and which many expounders of Prophecy regard as so near to us, that even the seniors amongst us may expect to witness them. Their calculations are based upon an elaborate comparison of dates which they find in the writings of Daniel and the revelations of St. John, and may be, to a certain extent, correct. But, whether correct or otherwise, they have no immediate connexion with the blessings I am describing, and which are to be realised, if there be anything like sequence in the predictions of St. John, after the general resurrection, the final Judgment, and the passing away of the heavens and earth with which we are now familiar.

And you will also perceive, that I do not anticipate, the *coming down* of these blessings to us from a higher world, to be enjoyed in a renovated Earth, but our

going up to them, even as the blessed Jesus did, when He left Mount Olivet, and, making the clouds His chariot and walking upon the wings of the wind, went up far above all heavens that are visible to our mortal sight. To prepare mansions for His people, He went *away* from the present world, bidding us look for them, not here, but in "His Father's House." When He returns in Glory, it will be to "receive His people unto Himself, that where He is, there they may be also." In the mean time, they are to set their affections not on the earth in a renovated state, but "on things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Moreover, when they attain their final rest, they will be the companions of angels, of those unfallen spirits who have hitherto had their homes in the regions of light, and sung their anthems in the immediate vicinity of the Throne of God: can it be imagined for a moment, that the celestial Hierarchy, angels, archangels and all the company of Heaven, the Church of the redeemed and the Redeemer of the Church, Immanuel, God with us, are to be transferred from the heights of the celestial Zion, to this contracted sphere, to have their eternal dwelling place in a world, which has withered under the curse of heaven, because of man's apostacy from God?

In regard to the *moral* aspect of that world, to which the believer looks for his final rest, there cannot be a shadow of doubt. Whatever else is questionable, this is certain: it is a place "wherein dwelleth righteousness;" and in this respect, stands widely contrasted with the scene we at present occupy. We have a righteousness, my Brethren, a perfect righteousness, even in this world, if we are believers in the Son of God; but that righteousness is an imputed one: we are accounted righteous and treated as such, because of what Christ has done for us. And we have also a personal righteousness, consisting of

holy thoughts, desires and acts, just so far as our hearts are brought under the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost. But how imperfect is that righteousness, even in the most perfect of the saints of God! What coldness, what omissions, what worldliness do they betray! How little of the mind of Christ, of His patience, His meekness, His self-denial, His compassion, His zeal, His purity and love to God and man do they exhibit! And yet *they* are the only exceptions to the universal prevalence of sin in the human family. In all others, it rules supreme. Of this world, including the vast majority of its inhabitants, it must be confessed, that now, as well as in the day of Christ's earthly sojourn, "it lieth in wickedness." And herein consists the great and important difference, the difference that outweighs all other considerations between the present and the future inheritance of the believer. He looks forward to a world, which sin never enters, from which the drunkard, the swearer, the fornicator, the adulterer, the murderer, the liar, the idolater, and the thief are forever excluded, a world in which righteousness, pure, perfect, unsullied, universal righteousness, has, not merely a temporary lodging, like the guest that tarries but a night, but its permanent everlasting dwelling place, sanctifying every mansion, and gladdening every breast with the glow of transcendent, unutterable joy.

III. And here my Brethren! we are compelled to feel, what the Apostle proceeds to urge upon us with the most impressive earnestness, *the necessity of preparation for a world so different from this.*

But *how* are we to prepare for it? How are we to live so as to be meet for it? How are we to think, to feel, to act, so that when we go up to those higher realms there may be a correspondence between our thoughts, and feelings, and habits, with those of the blessed spirits who have ever dwelt there?

Certain it is, that, in order to be prepared for that world, we must first be *true believers*. Our hearts must be the seat of that genuine living and abiding faith, which takes firm hold of the promises of God, which gives a reality to the blessings they unfold, and so commends them to our affections, that we long to reach them, "looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

Equally certain it is that *we must aim at the true standard of Christian attainment*, that come when the summons may that calls us to the bar of Christ, whether it finds us amidst the ranks of the living, or the tenants of the silent tomb, we "may be found of Him in peace," without spot and blameless." In peace, i. e. in *His love and favor*: "without spot and blameless," i. e. leading a life untarnished by immoral acts, and which defies even the enemies of God to sully the reputation of it. It is of character, not of privilege, of sanctification, not of justification that the Apostle is here speaking, when he employs the strong terms, "without spot and blameless," and it is obvious that to reach and retain that standard, there must be a *diligence* proportioned to the end in view, and the difficulties to be encountered in arriving at it. The irresolute, the luke warm, and the loiterer cannot reach it. They will always be below the standard or behind the time. They will not be found in armour when the trumpet sounds. When the cry is raised that "the bridegroom cometh," they will not be able to respond "even so come Lord Jesus."

In the Christian conflict, diligence is essential to success, and *caution* no less than diligence. Dangers are on every hand. Vigilance must be aroused to meet them. The infidel's scoff, the worlding's invitations and the sensualist's allurements, are too strong for those who are off their guard. You may have much light, much confidence, much joy, and yet fail to persevere. You may have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and yet not prove faithful unto death.

Declension in religion is a gradual thing. It comes stealthily upon us. There is first the day of *wavering*, when men begin to doubt the truth they had previously embraced, then the day of *supineness*, when they become weary in well doing; then the day of *looking back*, when they begin to long for the pleasures they had renounced, and then, finally, the utter estrangement of the heart from God, the sad prognostication of that everlasting severance "from the presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His Power," which will be realized in that final scene, where their choice will become their punishment, their own selection, the source of their eternal woe.

"Seeing," says the Apostle, "that ye know these things before hand, beware lest ye also," ye whom I delight to recognize as persons who have obtained the like precious faith with myself,* and whose pure minds I wish to stir up by way of remembrance,† "lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

And then, my Brethren, he finishes this instructive chapter, by adding a precept, which, if only acted upon by those who profess to be looking for "the new heavens and the new earth," would guard them on their way to them, and ensure their entrance at the close of their perilous journey. "But grow he says, in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

By "the grace of Christ" is meant *His favor*, and the *fruits* of that favor, those holy dispositions and internal graces in which the image of God consists; and, by "the knowledge of Christ," that spiritual discernment of the beauty and excellence of His character, the depths of His love, the riches of His grace, the fulness of His wisdom, the preciousness of His promises, and the glories of His Kingdom, which *they only* possess, whose hearts have been given to Him. And they all *do* possess them, though, in

* Chap. I. v. 12. † Chap. III. v. 1.

some instances perhaps, to a very limited extent. For in these acquisitions, my Brethren, there are different degrees, extending from the elementary grace and knowledge of the mere babe in Christ, up to the mature attainments of the veteran soldier of the cross, who has struggled in many a conflict, and prayed in many a struggle, and drawn strength in many an hour of weakness from Him in whom all fulness dwells, and who is still moving onwards and upwards, praying and trusting and struggling still, forgetting those things which are behind, and stretching forth unto those which are before, to reach, if possible, before he goes hence, "the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ."

It is to engage with vigor in this spiritual conflict, and to rise in this ascending scale of Christian attainment, that the Apostle summons us, when he bids us "grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ." And he does this, for *two* reasons, first, that *progress* may prevent *declension*, that a nearer *union with God* may counteract the tendency to *apostatize from Him*; and secondly, that, as time rolls on and we proceed from strength to strength, and the distance shortens that intervenes between us and the object of our desires, there may be in us a *closer correspondence in our dispositions, feelings and habits, with those of the happy and holy occupants of the world of glory.*

May it be your happiness, my Brethren! to know experimentally what this progress means, that as you look for "new heavens and a new earth," at the final Advent of the Lord, you may be yourselves in all respects, "new creatures in Christ," prepared to taste the joys, and mingle with the inhabitants, and engage in the hallowed employments of a world, where righteousness, with all its happy results, completely, universally, everlastingly reigns.—
AMEN!

"O Ephraim what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee? For
your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.—
Hosea vi. 4. *

THE present Sunday, occurring as it does on New Year's day, has its claim to a peculiar class of topics; and it is well for us, at such a time, to give them a full share of our attention. We naturally and profitably it may be hoped, turn to the changes which are incident to our condition in the present life, and think of how many of these we have witnessed in the little span of a single year. We have seen changes pass over the face of Nature: the scene around us has gone through the several revolutions which Divine Wisdom has appointed for the comfort of man. We have seen changes in Society around us: some are added to it whom in former years we knew not: some are gone from it to the silent tomb whom we had long rejoiced to know. The aspect of the times has changed. Troubled as the political atmosphere of the world was a twelvemonth ago it has become more lowering in the intermediate time; wars and rumours of wars are on every side. Our own plans, in many instances, and our prospects, it may be, have changed. A thousand designs have been formed and frustrated since we last assembled at this season, and a multitude of new ones are now in possession of our hearts, which will probably share the same fate before we celebrate it again.

But there are changes, my Brethren! of a different class, which merit more attention, changes, the influence of

* This sermon, though not one of the Advent course, was added, in consequence of a request to that effect.

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which will be felt when seasons have ceased to roll, and times to alter, and plans and purposes to fail, when all that is now mutable and varying around us shall have given place to the fixed, permanent, unalterable things of eternity. And what are these? They are the changes which we experience in reference to spiritual things, the changes which bring our souls more near to God, or carry them farther from Him. The former, assuming them to be genuine and permanent, are blessed changes: we cannot in this life duly estimate the value of them; but like all other good things, they have their counterfeits where the resemblance may be close, but the result of mistake is fatal. It is quite possible to experience many changes in our religious state and feelings, to be frequently under the influence of some of them, and yet, in reality, to be no farther advanced towards heaven than we were before; because though alterations have taken place in us, they have not been effectual or durable ones. Are there none of us who are sensible of having realized these? Are there none whose hearts can testify of holy resolutions formed and broken? of serious intentions framed and relinquished? of vows and promises which heaven has heard expressed, but never seen fulfilled? If there be, and doubtless there are such before me, let me invite them to fix their thoughts upon a passage which accurately describes their state, and what is more important, the light in which God regards it. It was addressed, it is true, to another people, but is applicable to all who in any measure resemble them, and may, through the blessing of God, be made effectual at this hour, to show to such the unsoundness of their religious condition.

I. The text exhibits, with great precision, the character of such persons. It tells us that their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away"

Here we may remark, with regard to these persons, that a certain goodness is attributed to them; and, from the context, it is obvious that this is not the goodness which belongs to deliberate hypocrites, nor, on the other hand, is it the goodness possessed by real penitents. It is, as distinguished from both of these, a seeming goodness, which pertains to the self deceiver, to the man who mistakes something short of real piety, for piety itself, something that savours of religion for *genuine* religion, something which imposes upon others and consoles his own heart, but is not after all the one thing needful for his salvation.

The first characteristic of this goodness then is, that it is *fair and imposing in its appearance*. What is more beautiful than the morning cloud which catches and reflects the rays of the rising sun? What is more bright and fair than the drops of dew which glitter in the early light? Who that, for the first time, fixed his eyes upon these splendid objects, would ever imagine them to be the fleeting unsubstantial things they are!

Yet just so fair and imposing in outward appearance, is the religion which has no true or solid foundation to rest upon. It is seen upon the early effusion of light, when the pure rays of the Gospel first open upon the benighted mind: it is seen glistening with joy and hope, and lifting itself to heaven with lofty promises and professions; but, it has no penitence, no humility, no self-denial, no fervent love, no real holiness attached to it. It is not the religion which springs from the gracious work of the Spirit of God upon the heart, but some faint and imperfect impression, which is too readily mistaken for it.

It is an easy thing, my Brethren, to mistake mere *animal* feeling for true devotion; and yet, no two things are more essentially distinct than they: the highest degree

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of the one may exist, without any portion of the other. A worldly man, for example, may feel much under the preaching of the Gospel or the lofty strains of sacred melody, yet be a worldly man still. Even an infidel may melt at the narrative of a Saviour's sufferings, or the pathetic and earnest appeals of His love, and yet be an infidel still; nay that heart which dissolves at the bare mention of death, judgment and Eternity, may be without any true faith in Christ, or genuine love to God. Let us then take heed how we place any confidence in the transient ebullitions of animal feeling: let us examine carefully into their origin, and mark what influence they exert upon the general tenour of our lives, for these are the only evidences of their connexion with vital piety, upon which we can safely rely.

In regard to the goodness mentioned in the text you may observe that *it is a mere fleeting and evanescent possession.* By the "morning cloud" is meant, those light mists or vapors which accumulate during the night, and which, together with the drops of dew, are dispersed by the rays of the ascending sun; and, if so, how perfect is the image which is here employed to describe those light and superficial impressions, which are often mistaken for real piety. Mark the accuracy of the image. A little light discloses the beauty of the cloud and dew. A little more disperses it. Thus a little light, in matters of religion, often brings to view those feelings and emotions which look like the effects of grace, but a little more dissolves the charm and they are gone. How often do we see those who have apparently begun to run well, turn aside for the most trifling obstacle! How often does the discovery that the path is narrow and steep, discourage the heart which at first seemed to burn with zeal and ardour to pursue it! How often does a little opposition from the world, or

ridicule from profane companions turn back the young disciple who had resolved to depart from sin, and again entangle those, who had escaped from the pollutions of the world! The truth is, my Brethren, that unless the foundation be laid in a full discovery of the guilt and misery of sin, the impression never will be deep or lasting: it will not break the charm of worldly delusions, or lead it captive to that Saviour who alone can enable him to resist them. It will please the eye of the beholder, and deceive its possessor for a season, but like the morning cloud and early dew, it will soon vanish and be forgotten.

Let it be noted also with care, that this species of goodness, *may be renewed again and again with as little permanent effect as the first impression produced.* The cloud and the dew return at stated intervals: they appear indeed to vanish utterly from existence before the rays of the sun, but night resumes her dominion and brings them in her train, and morning exhibits them again, as fair, as imposing, as beautiful and attractive as ever.

And thus it is with those imperfect impressions, to which the text refers our attention: they have their intervals when they go and come, their seasons when they vanish and return, their evenings and their mornings when they dissolve and when they unite again.

They are apt for example, to be renewed by our solemn Festivals which bring conspicuously before us the great facts of the christian revelation. There is something in the religion of Christ which is awfully grand and impressive: there is something in the Spirit of His dispensation which is inexpressibly gracious and tender. How is it possible to listen to its wondrous disclosures, to frequent its sacred ordinances, to approach its hallowed sacraments, and not feel some strong emotions excited in our breasts? That heart must be stone indeed, which can enter and leave the

house of God, without some feelings of awe, affection or sorrow. But yet, how little dependence is to be placed upon these transient emotions! How little may that man have of true religion, whose heart is most susceptible of them! How frequently may they be felt in the Sanctuary or even at the table of Christ, without exerting the smallest influence upon our daily plans and conduct! And why do they not exert this influence? Because in the cases supposed they are mere animal and not spiritual affections, the offspring of the *natural*, not of the *renewed* heart, and, like every thing else which springs from this corrupt source, perishable in their nature.

These emotions are often excited also, by *deep and heavy afflictions*. Affliction is the messenger of Heaven, sent to arouse the careless soul and wean it from the world; and though it often fails to effect this gracious purpose, yet it seldom departs without producing some inward emotion which savours of a religious feeling, some sentiment of compunction, some holy purpose, some pious resolution or design. But alas! how seldom does it produce an effectual and lasting change! How few, comparatively speaking, of the sons and daughters of affliction will be able in the end to say, it is good for me to have been afflicted! It may be frequently the case, that, "by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better;" but more frequently, it is to be feared, the heart is left where it was. I appeal to your experience upon this point, your experience in those hours of trial when you have said with apparent sincerity, "come let us return unto the Lord, for He hath torn, and He will heal us, He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." How often has this language flowed from the lips of some of us, in whose hearts the power of religion never has been truly felt! How often when you have mourned over

some distressing bereavement have you returned and inquired after God, but when the tear was dried upon the cheek, returned and inquired after the world! How often when sitting by the bed of a dying friend, have you remembered that God was your rock, and the high God your Redeemer; but when the friend was gone, remembered these things no more! Alas! You did but flatter Him with your mouth; your heart was not right with Him; therefore you have not been steadfast in His covenant; it was not true repentance you felt, therefore "your goodness has been like the morning cloud, and as the early dew which goeth away."

Such emotions may be excited also, upon the *approach of death, or in the moments of imminent danger*. The visitations of Providence may impress us when they affect our *property* or our *friends*; but when they touch our persons, their appeal is more forcible and irresistible—When they lay us upon the bed from whence we expect to pass to the Judgment Throne of God; when the hour is at hand, in which a heart searching Judge is to place our misdeeds before Him, and our secret sins in the light of His countenance, then the long list of laws broken, duties neglected, mercies slighted, passions unsubdued, and sins unmortified, appears in array before the guilty soul; then for a time, the heart relents, the soul trembles, the tear falls, and the holy resolution is formed, to live in future for God, and for God alone. But is the resolution kept if it should please God to restore us? Ah my Brethren! how many living examples are there at this moment, to prove that these impressions also, are often like the morning cloud, and the early dew! How obvious is it that they are frequently the result of a guilty fear alone, without any portion of love, that they come with the hour of danger, and depart when it is gone! How many of us,

if we suffer ourselves to be candid, must bear testimony to the truth of this statement! How many does the Almighty address when He says—"Woe unto them, for they have fled from me; they have not cried unto me with their hearts when they mourned upon their beds: they returned, but not to the Most High; they are like a deceitful bow!"

II. We see then, the nature of that goodness which resembles the morning cloud, and the early dew, how widely it differs from that genuine religion which belongs to the faithful servant of God, which is based upon a true faith, and animated by the principle of love. But let us now turn to contemplate the more important inquiry, viz, *In what light does God behold the character of such persons?* What views of their state does He indicate, when He makes the pathetic appeal—"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?"

This is evidently not the language of a stern and unrelenting Judge, but of a kind and affectionate parent, who has long been wearied with the perverseness of a wayward child, and who now almost despairing of his repentance, beholds him with grief and tender concern. It shews, but in language full of condescension and kindness, *the sinfulness of their state*, who thus trifle with the goodness of God. It implies that it is a state of rebellion persisted in, notwithstanding frequent and earnest attempts to reclaim them. This was precisely the case of Ephraim and Judah when this appeal was made to them. From the time that the two kingdoms had separated under the successors of Solomon, to the days of Hosea which was about two centuries and a half, incessant efforts had been made to wean them from their idolatries, but all in vain. Momentary impressions were produced, but only momentary: they were an impenitent people still.

And are they who claim the privileges, but imitate the perverseness of Ephraim and Judah less guilty at the present hour? Think, my Brethern! of the mercies you have realized in your persons, property or friends. Think of the light you have enjoyed under the Gospel of the Son of God. Think of the means which God has employed to reconcile you to himself. Think of the infinite ransom which He has given for your souls, think of the warnings He has sent you, of the time He has afforded you, and the strong encouragement He has held out to you, and then say, whether a state of impenitence in your case; or what amounts to the same thing, a state of wavering and uncertain devotions, is not a state of deep and aggravated sin?

These momentary relentings you are apt to think will mitigate your guilt in the sight of a holy God. But you mistake the case: they will rather tend to aggravate it, and deepen its crimson dye. They are registered in heaven, to shew that you were conscious of what you ought to have been, and to prove that means were employed to bring you to a holy state. They will be enumerated, on the day of account, to exhibit the violence you were constrained to do to your feelings, in resisting the Grace of God, to confirm the solemn fact, that when you resigned yourselves to the world again, you did it against the strong convictions of your conscience, against the best feelings of your heart, against the dictates of an enlightened judgment. Oh let nothing conceal from you the solemn fact, that such a state as yours is a state of aggravated guilt; for one day or other, this truth must force itself upon your convictions.

The language of the text suggests *the danger and misery of such a state*; it implies that something must be done to reclaim such characters, that some expedient must be tried more painful than any which has hitherto been employed. God is too merciful to relinquish without

some great effort, the souls of men. Where lesser judgments have been tried in vain, some greater ones must be inflicted. Have you hitherto resisted the calls and warnings of God? Have you remained impenitent under His successive mercies and judgments? Has year after year revolved, and found you still destitute of true and vital religion? What shall the merciful and gracious Father of Heaven now do to restore you? He has not, we will suppose, yet given you up to your idols. He has not yet solemnly sworn that you shall never enter into His rest. He is still bending over you with the gaze of Parental affection, and saying, "How shall I give thee up Ephraim, how shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah, how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" And what course do you imagine He will adopt, in order to avoid this fatal issue? Perhaps He will lay some deep affliction, some painful dispensation upon you, He will do to you, as He did to Ephraim and Judah. And what was this? Hear it in His own words, "I will be unto Ephraim as a Lion and as a young Lion to the House of Judah. I, even I will tear and go away. I will go, and return to my place, and they shall acknowledge their offence and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early."

There is yet more however, implied in the words before us. They suggest, and this is indeed the most important intimation they afford, *the fatal issue of such a state, if persisted in, notwithstanding these repeated efforts on the part of God.* Wherefore does this pathetic language issue from the lips of Jehovah? Wherefore does He ask with apparent concern and grief, what course He shall adopt towards such persons? Because He knows it to be impossible to extend the blessing of His friendship to them in their present state, and, as a necessary consequence, that unless they are changed, and brought to a very different one, their souls must perish forever.

This is a solemn thought. All other considerations are of little moment in comparison of this. All minor judgments are but the small dust in the balance, when compared with that final sentence which is to effect an everlasting separation between the soul and its God! Let us bring this thought, my Brethren, home to our hearts. Let us be assured that, the goodness which now resembles the morning cloud and the early dew, is not the goodness that is to flourish in Heaven. A few more nights of sorrow may renew it here, and a few more morning suns may chase it from us again, but when the sun is darkened, and the moon is blood, and the stars have fallen from their lofty spheres, when the heavens are rolled together, and the earth consumed, and we removed to a scene, where all is lasting, changeless, and eternal, this goodness will not place us among the sons of God, or fit us to celebrate His praises in the Sanctuary above.

The counsel, then, which solemnly and emphatically claims your attention, is this—*Be sure you do not mistake the nature of true religion.* Remember it is not forms, or doctrines, or transient feelings, but the holy affection of love to God and the children of God, deeply and permanently seated in the heart, having the Divine Spirit for its author, holiness and all good works for its effects, and Heaven for the scene of its full and final expansion.

Such is true religion: bear it ever in mind; and, as the last truth which the text enforces upon you, *never imagine that you can be saved without it.* As coming from God, adoring God, and resembling God, this religion is adapted to the world where God reigns; and no other religion, and nothing short of this can be adapted to that world. Then seek for this inestimable treasure now while time is afforded you to obtain it. Halt no longer between two opinions. Cease from the vain attempt to unite the services of God and mammon. Aim at something more than the mere feelings of a moment: aim at the possession of a new heart, and a right spirit, a heart which can find its delight in God on earth, and, in God, its recompense in Heaven.—AMEN!

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